

GSB Author Interview: Chè Phoenix

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/gsb-author-interview-che-phoenix/>

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Chè Phoenix scribbles story ideas on a pad of paper that rests on her knee as she drives an 18-wheel truck with a bottle of cool green tea in the holster. This gal's a true globetrotter, but of all the places she's been, her favorite spot is the sparkling island of Corfu.

Chè Phoenix's newest illustrated storybook, **Where Did All of This Dirt Come From?** is coming out later this month. Look for this funny, muddy, rhyming book. It is perfect for dirty boys.

The thing I like best about this book is that it's something for the whole family. Mom and Dad get involved with the fun and mess of playing in the dirt with their kids. It's refreshing to read and the illustrations are just spot-on for the lively tone of this sweet story.

Like most writers, Chè Phoenix was first inspired to delve into storybooks for kids because she saw a need for better books. She has three kids, and as most parents will tell you, finding good books for young boys in particular just isn't easy. There's a noticeable lack in the market.

Why write it while driving an 18-wheeler? "Being alone in a truck for extended periods of time allows for boredom *and* creativity."

Here's what Chè had to say about her experience in bringing together her latest book, Where Did All of This Dirt Come From?

GreatStorybook: What was your inspiration for writing **Where Did All of This Dirt Come From?**

Chè Phoenix: My boyfriend, who is also a writer, had a box of Idea Notes. I was curiously looking through it and found, “Where did all of this dirt come from?” Written on a scrap of paper.

I immediately said the first couple of lines that are now in the book.

“Max and Jack woke up to find a mountain of dirt just outside.

Where did it come from? How did it get here?

Do mom and dad know? Did it magically appear?”

That was in 2007.

GreatStorybook: How was the contract arranged with your illustrator, Joseph Cowman?

Chè Phoenix: I found my amazing illustrator [Joseph Cowman](#) on an [online freelance service](#). We followed the Terms and Agreements of that site.

GSB: He really is amazing. Did you work directly with Cowman or through an editor/agent?

Chè: I worked directly with Joseph through the freelance site. I have yet to talk to him on the phone or meet in person. I am very excited to one day meet him. Neither Joseph nor I used an agent.

GSB: Is this title self-published? If so, how did you determine to do it and why?

Chè: This title is published through [Capital Apple Press](#). This way I can retain more creative control.

GSB: You added recipes at the end of the book. I think this is a really fun idea. Was that part of the story concept from the beginning or was it something that unfolded later?

Chè: I considered adding recipes only after speaking with my editor, [Ally Bishop](#). During a late night editing chat the addition of recipes was suggested. I immediately ran through my family’s favorite concoctions and decided on a few that made sense for the book.

GSB: What is the thing you are most proud of with this book?

Chè: When I overhear children randomly recite lines from the book as they play. There is no other feeling like that in the world.

GSB: Is there anything you wish were different about the book, and if so, what?

Chè: Lines of text were cut in editing and I have been questioning that decision ever since.

GSB: Are you touring the book? Where – and what has your experience been like?

Chè: I am touring with this book. I do mall appearances, libraries, schools and preschools. I've met with Girl Scouts in pursuit of their Bookbinding Badge. The experience of touring is interesting. People are very receptive and friendly.

GSB: You really write while truckin' along in an 18-wheeler?

Chè: I wrote this book on my leg while I was driving an 18-wheeler. I would think up the rhyme, jot it on the note pad resting on my leg, and then rewrite it when I got to my destination. I think all of the books I have written so far were created in this manner.

I typically edit the work sitting on my bed. I'm domestic-minded and love to be comfortable. One thousand count organic Egyptian cotton sheets, down filled pillows and my hand-crocheted afghan from my grandmother. It altogether makes my bed the most comfortable place for working.

GSB: What is for you the most challenging aspect of creating an illustrated storybook like this?

Chè: Easily the most challenging aspect of creating a picture book is cutting text. There are many reasons for cutting, especially because the illustrations carry much of the story.

Cutting text is like creating something beautiful only to throw it in the trash. It is very painful. But in the end hopefully you will have a much better product.

This was definitely a surprise for me. I thought that my story was perfect. Boy was I mistaken.

GSB: Would you say you have a philosophy of story-telling?

Chè: When I became a mother I entered the world of All Things Children. I have not been thrilled with the options out there for beginning readers. A lot of the books available portray situations and behavior that I do not find desirable.

I began creating my own stories to fill the gaps. I write rhymes to aid children with reading memorization and confidence. Rhymes should be fun, childlike and a tiny bit educational.

GSB: You probably have another story coming soon. Can you talk about that a bit?

Chè: My next story is tentatively titled **Grandma's New Crayons**. It is a rhyming story about a little boy and a brand new box of crayons from his Grandma. I'm really excited about this book. I have [already] sketched out most of the scenes.

I am tossing around the idea of creating the book in a "claymation" style. I happen to be a much better sculpture than illustrator.

GSB: What kind of writing were you doing before you decided to jump into childrens' books?

Chè: I wrote logs and checks to pay bills! [Chè laughs.]

GSB: Do you have a marketing plan for this book? Could you share that a bit?

Chè: Yes. I am taking baby steps. I am currently scheduled with several local libraries for their summer reading programs. I plan to fill my schedule with events throughout the year. I will entertain any and all media or event opportunities.

GSB: If you could read your story to any particular person in the world, who would it be?

Chè: Everyone I love has already read this story. I can think of no one... perhaps the Newbery committee!

Keep creating, no matter what.

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